



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on 12th Economic Forum and Reform of the Economic Forum

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you Mr. Chairman, and thank you Mr. Swiecicki for your report. I would also like to thank our Czech hosts who, as usual, were superb, as was the support rendered by the Secretariat and the Prague office.

Rather than comment today on the substance of this year's Economic Forum, I would like to offer a few general observations and suggestions on the Economic Forum's form. I hope these ideas will feed into the ongoing debate on how to improve this annual event and the preparatory seminars leading up to it.

First of all, let's take a look at the theme. Based on the U.S. delegations' experience attending the Economic Fora, it has become clear that the Forum themes are too broad, spanning too large of a policy area to be covered at the one meeting. This results, inevitably, in different groups of participants discussing parts of the theme, with little crossover. A more focused Forum theme would help to better define the discussions at the Forum and the Preparatory Seminars.

The underlying cause of the problem I just outlined is that the identification of three possible preparatory seminars is becoming a major factor in choosing the Economic Forum theme, which is the reverse of what should be the case.

In any event, we need to review the number, length and location of the preparatory seminars. At present, a lot of travel time and time out of the office is expended for these one and a half day meetings. Would we perhaps be better off with two seminars that are two full days long? If we keep three seminars, should we do one in Vienna so more delegations could participate? These are questions we need to ask ourselves. Certainly, meetings should be in capitals or other major cities, with regular and reliable airline connections, to minimize travel time.

Similarly, we need to review the length and the structure of the Economic Forum. What is eluding us is the right combination of length, content and output to ensure good participation, not only from Vienna but also from capitals. We are not yet giving senior policy makers a reason to attend. We would suggest that we need to reduce the number of working sessions, put "side events" on the side, and have them run concurrently with working groups, and only do a special session if there really is something special to discuss.

At present, and we are not the first to make this observation, the Economic Forum is little more than a fourth preparatory seminar. In this format, it fails to add significant value to

the other preparatory seminars or provide a reason for capitals to send high-level delegations.

Finally, I'd like to touch on the presentations. It is our experience that the good work of the Chairmanship and of the Secretariat in putting together high quality keynote panels, and identifying important issues to be raised and discussed, is often undone by the number of speakers, the quality of their presentations and the management of the sessions.

Quality control has to be a start to finish endeavor. It is not enough to assemble the right people, we have to ensure that they do what they've been invited to do. Our money and our time are at stake.

In general, we believe we need fewer speakers and better presentations. The Chairmanship should have a vision of what it wishes to accomplish in its Forum, and an idea of what topics must be covered to meet the substantive aims. The Secretariat must work with the Chairmanship to identify speakers and to assign them very specific topics. Care should be taken so that all speakers in a session talk about something truly different, and do not simply tell the same story using different examples.

It is imperative that the Coordinator's office takes responsibility for the quality of the presentations. In the first instance, speakers need a clear understanding of what they are expected to deliver and to whom they are speaking. Whatever is currently being given to speakers to prepare them for their participation in the Economic Fora is not working.

Speakers should be required to submit a one-page overview of their remarks to the Economic Coordinator's Office at least three weeks before the Forum. The Coordinator's Office and the Chairmanship should review these summaries to ensure that the proposed remarks adequately address the assigned topic. If not, the speaker should be given specific suggestions on how to refocus his remarks. This takes work, time and follow through, but the improved results should justify the effort.

Mr. Chairman, I have gone on at length today because this issue and this Dimension require our sustained and ardent attention. There should be no doubt that we are committed to strengthening the Economic and Environmental Dimension.

Political change and democratic transformation are only sustainable if citizens feel they are truly better off. Economic well-being is a sizeable component of a person's overall satisfaction. We rely on the OSCE's Economic Coordinator and on the Economic and Environmental officers in the field missions to lead our efforts in this regard, and we must ensure that the dimension's premier event – the Economic Forum – is as efficient and effective as possible. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman